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In the Memory of Man....

25 Years with The Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds

HISTORY is a most effective factor in shaping the present. A quarter of a century may not seem a large segment when dates and events are arrayed in sequence of time. But oftimes antiquity in name is last to be sought and vitality of purpose is the renewing spirit to keep fast hold on the present. Thus may we speak of The Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds.

The organization, in a manner of speaking, emerged from the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. It was in 1927 that the late Dr. Richard A. Rendich, a prominent roentgenologist, made plans for the first Retreat of Brooklyn physicians. The credit is his for the arrangement of this retreat held at Mount Manresa Retreat House, out of which emerged the Guild movement. At an organization meeting Dr. Rendich was elected president. The "retreat group" rapidly changed into "The Guild." The transformation was a fundamental one. In reality, it was simply carrying over into the daily life of the physician, into his professional interests and attitudes and his philosophy of life, the thinking, the inspiration, and determination on the retreat meditation of the Kingdom of Christ.

Brooklyn led the way. In the next few years the spirit caught on; other groups in the area were formed, as well as in Boston and

the middle-west. By 1932 those dreaming of an organization of Catholic physicians who might put their scientific and professional standing solidly behind the defense and advocacy of Catholic moral and religious teaching united to found a national organization called The Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds. The number of groups has fluctuated through the years; the depression years and World War II took toll on promotion. But it survived.

Almost simultaneously with the foundation of the Federation, THE LINACRE QUARTERLY came into being as its official organ, under the inspiration of and splendid editing by Dr. Anthony Bassler of New York. Its name is symbolic of the aims of the Federation and was chosen by Dr. James J. Walsh whose erudite contributions to the journal in those early years lent high character to the publication. Thomas Linacre was the physician to Henry the Eighth. He founded the Royal College of Physicians and through it regulated the practice of medicine in England. He was looked upon as one of the great scholars of his day. Having become a priest in his later life, he united in himself the ideals of classical scholarship, scientific medicine, and practical Catholicism.

For a decade and a half, the Federation was under the able

guidance of Father Ignatius W. Cox, S.J., whose spirit kept it alive during the early years and inspired its leaders with hope that future Guilds would be formed to carry out the organization's objectives. A moving story could be written of the marvelous devotion and self-sacrifice of Dr. Joseph Dillon and his wife in contributing so much of their time to the work of the Federation and THE LINACRE QUARTERLY. And the effort of Mrs. Dillon in this same direction after her husband's death was a "labor of love" as she herself stated; her spirit of devotion to a cause she felt in keeping with service to the Great Physician was reflected in the many years she gave as Editor and Manager of THE LINACRE QUARTERLY and inspiration to those laying the foundations for the Federation to grow.

Gradually a few more Guilds were added to the roster. LINACRE QUARTERLY struggled in the land of the living through some dark days. Then, as now, material for publication was hard to secure. Kindly critics who clamored for an expanded publication never knew the inner story of how hard it was for both the Federation and the journal to survive. It was only the persistent and inspired effort of those we have mentioned before who are to be thanked for the organization that exists today.

By 1944, it was felt that if the Federation was to attain the objectives of its founders, it would be necessary for some agency to assume the responsibility for the business management and administration of the Federation and also

the editing and circulation of THE LINACRE QUARTERLY. Father Cox, burdened with other duties, was unable to continue as Moderator and rather than "abandon the ship" which he had done so much to guide on its early journeys, negotiated with the National Catholic Welfare Conference. An agreement was reached with that body after approval by its Administrative Board and request of The Catholic Hospital Association whereby Father Alphonse M. Schwitalla, S.J. would become Moderator of the Federation. Because of his position as Dean of St. Louis University Medical School and President of The Catholic Hospital Association, Father Schwitalla was an ideal choice for Moderator of the Federation and also Editor of THE LINACRE QUARTERLY, for both of which he was chosen by the Federation. The Executive Board of The Catholic Hospital Association expressed readiness to accept the responsibility for the business management and administration of the Federation and its journal in St. Louis, Missouri. Mr. M. R. Kneiff, Executive Secretary of the Association, in that capacity for the Federation ably assisted Father Schwitalla with the details of management.

The agreement between The Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds and The Catholic Hospital Association of the United States and Canada was finally signed August 3, 1945. The agreement in full was published in THE LINACRE QUARTERLY, No. 2, Vol. XIII, 1945.

Father Schwitalla, Mr. Kneiff, and staff members of The Catholic Hospital Association carried on the business functions of the Federation and published LINACRE QUARTERLY until April 1948. At that time for reasons of health Father Schwitalla was forced to resign his duties and the work of the Moderator was transferred to Father Donald A. McGowan, Director of Health and Hospitals, National Catholic Welfare Conference, Washington, D. C. Father John J. Flanagan, S.J., who succeeded Father Schwitalla as Executive Director of The Catholic Hospital Association, became Acting Editor of THE LINACRE QUARTERLY.

The central office for the Federation remained at 1438 South Grand Boulevard in St. Louis, and now concerted effort could be exerted to promote formation of more Guilds. From eleven in 1948 the total has grown in 1957 to sixty; the geographical span is from Vancouver, British Columbia to New York and from Minnesota to Puerto Rico. More than 4,300 Catholic physicians and a small number of dentists and pharmacists are members. The central office sends out organizational material on request and assists with formation of Guilds. Inquiries come from readers of LINACRE QUARTERLY and from recommendation of members of existing Guilds.

To strengthen the national organization, the Executive Board meeting comprised of the officers of the Federation and one representative from each constituent

Guild, had convened in conjunction with the annual American Medical Association convention. It was soon evident, with the growth in number of Guilds, that brevity of time precluded the transaction of business during those sessions and for the past five years a second meeting of the Board has been held in the winter to afford more opportunity for discussion of an ever enlarging agenda. THE LINACRE QUARTERLY reports the deliberations of these meetings.

With spiritual motivation the keynote of all activities, the Federation sponsors the observance of the "White Mass" to honor St. Luke, Patron of Physicians, on his Feast Day, October 18. The Guilds arrange for the Mass in hospital chapels, parish churches, Cathedrals, and even, last year, at the Tokyo International Airport chapel, Japan.

Besides the Executive Board meeting held during the A.M.A. sessions, the Federation is now among the many exhibitors who engage booths for the convention. The impact of such a project can exercise a positive influence on this powerful group of professional men. For the first time in 1956, members of various Guilds were on hand at the Chicago sessions to talk with visitors regarding medical problems in the light of Catholic teaching. Literature was distributed along with copies of THE LINACRE QUARTERLY. Non-Catholic physicians in the numbers were attracted to the booth; much interest was evinced on the part of Catholic medical men in

the activities of Guilds and the Federation. This is to be a continuing project.

Reports of activities of the constituent Guilds are mailed to the central office and are a matter of record. This is a point of discussion on the agenda of the Federation Board meetings. Projects vary with locality. Autonomy is reserved to the individual groups, making for a flexible functioning. Always, the purpose is to bring spiritual counsel and moral guidance to the physician member so that he may be a more deeply religious man and a better Catholic in his daily practice of medicine.

In such a writing as this, only the national aspect can be discussed. It is for each Guild to examine its own record and to see wherein it has contributed to the general welfare.

THE LINACRE QUARTERLY, of course, provides the lasting memorial of its parent, the Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds. Its pages have revealed the needs of the times when medicine should have become a useful ally to those causes needing a valiant champion, in those early days when the Catholic Church alone had the coordinated body of moral and religious truths capable of saving the science of medicine from an abuse

of science. Father Cox, Dr. Passler and Dr. Dillon in their great wisdom worked assiduously to publish material to keep their subscribers informed of Catholic principles as applied to the needs of their times. Without their solicitude and the inspiration of Dr. Rendich who has the admiration and respect of all for his magnificent vision that established the Brooklyn Guild and paved the way for the Federation, there would be no occasion for this present writing.

Rather than have history repeat itself, it is the feeling at this quarter-century mark, that the Divine Physician is a vigorous motive for the Catholic medical man of today to pursue his Christ-like work of mercy and of professional competence, idealism, and self-forgetfulness. Christ could never have identified the work of the physician with medical economics or medical politics or medico-legal legislation; for Christ, the work of the physician has been first and foremost, a personal, competent service to the sick. And with the foundation well laid for the Catholic Physicians' Guild movement, another twenty-five years can well record a meeting of the challenges Catholic men in medicine have met in the light of their religious convictions.

— J. R.